

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 1276

EXDIS - MILITARY ADDRESSEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, MASS, SP, LY
SUBJECT: SPANISH RELATIONS WITH LIBYA

1. DURING THE COURSE OF A CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA AT HIS REQUEST ON FEBRUARY 16 COVERING OTHER MATTERS, HE MENTIONED THAT PRIME MINISTER SUAREZ WOULD PROBABLY BE MAKING A TWO-DAY VISIT TO LIBYA IN THE RELATIVELY NEAR FUTURE. HE RECALLED THAT AT ONE TIME IT WAS PLANNED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD GO TO BOTH MALTA AND LIBYA. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE LIBYAN VISIT COULD NOT BE WORKED OUT AT THE TIME AND IN ANY EVENT SUAREZ HAD TO CANCEL HIS ENTIRE ME TRIP. EFFORTS ARE AGAIN BEING MADE TO ARRANGE A DATE FOR THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO LIBYA.

2. I RAISED AN EYEBROW SOMEWHAT AT THE LIBYAN VISIT AND INQUIRED WHY THE PRIME MINISTER SHOULD BE SO MUCH INTERESTED IN THAT COUNTRY. OREJA REPLIED THAT SPAIN WAS INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING COMMERCIAL RELATIONS WITH LIBYA AND, AS WE KNEW, SPAIN HOPED TO GET ORDERS FOR ITS INCREASINGLY IDLE SHIPYARDS. IN RESPONSE TO
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MY QUERY, OREJA CONFIRMED THAT THE SPANISH HAD SIGNED A CONTRACT WITH LIBYA SOME TIME AGO TO CONSTRUCT SEVERAL SUBMARINES. ALTHOUGH THE LIBYANS KEPT CHANGING THEIR MINDS AS TO WHAT THEY WANTED, IT NOW APPEARED THAT THE CONTRACTS WOULD GO THROUGH AND THE SUBMARINES WOULD BE BUILT. HE GAVE NO ESTIMATED TIME FOR COMPLETION.

3. I TOLD OREJA THAT, ALTHOUGH I WAS NOT INSTRUCTED TO DO SO, I COULD TELL HIM THAT THE PRESENCE OF LIBYAN SUBMARINES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WOULD BE A MATTER OF CONSIDERABLE CONCERN TO THE US NAVY. SUCH WEAPONS IN THE HANDS OF A COUNTRY WHICH HAS HARDLY SHOWN A HIGH DEGREE OF INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY COULD CONTRIBUTE LITTLE TO STABILITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA. I ALSO WONDERED WHAT SOME OTHER COUNTRIES, SUCH AS EGYPT, WOULD THINK OF LIBYA HAVING A SUBMARINE FORCE.

4. OREJA ACKNOWLEDGED, LIBYA HAD NOT DEMONSTRATED MUCH INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, BUT ADDED THAT IF SPAIN DID NOT BUILD THE SUBMARINES, SOME OTHER COUNTRY WOULD AND SPAIN BADLY NEEDED THE ORDERS FOR ITS SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY. THIS LIBYAN MARKET WAS AN IMPORTANT ONE FOR SPAIN AND SPAIN'S ECONOMIC SITUATION REQUIRED IT TO SEEK AS MANY OUTLETS AS POSSIBLE FOR ITS PRODUCTION.

5. I SAID THAT WHILE I COULD UNDERSTAND THIS, IT STILL SEEMED TO ME THAT THE PROVISION OF SUBMARINES TO THE LIBYANS WAS NOT A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT. STABLER

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